

London's Health in 1953.

THE "Report of the County Medical Officer of Health and Principal School Medical Officer for 1953" has been published by the London County Council and reference is made in the following notes to some of the more interesting information which it contains.

Vital Statistics.

(a) *Population*—The estimated population at the middle of the year was 3,343,000, a decrease of 20,000 as compared with the previous year. The proportion of the aged is gradually increasing and reflects the fall in the birth rate and the greater expectation of life since the beginning of the present century. The 1951 census showed that out of every 100 persons in London approximately 16 were 60 years of age or over and of these about 11 were aged 65 years or older. About one-half of the persons over 60 years were married and the number of unmarried females was over three times that of unmarried males. Over one-fifth of the total number of persons 60 years of age and over were living alone.

(b) *Births*—The number of live births was 50,880 and the birth rate 15.2 per thousand of the population, compared with 15.3 in 1952, 15.6 in 1951, 15.7 in 1950, 16.7 in 1949 and 13.4 in 1938. The decline in the birth rate since 1948, though continuing, is tending to slow down.

(c) *Deaths*—The death rate was somewhat lower this year as compared with last year (11.6 per thousand as against 12.0). For the first time on record there were no deaths from diphtheria. The death rate from cancer (2.34 per 1,000) continues to increase and to constitute the second leading cause of death in London. Deaths due to violent causes during 1953 totalled 1,437 as compared with 1,363 in 1952. There were 247 deaths from road accidents compared with 221 in 1952. Home accidents figure largely in the total deaths due to violent causes, and their prevention constitutes a major public health problem. The deaths of children under 1 year was 23.9 per 1,000 live births compared with 23.1 in 1952, 25.4 in 1951 and 25.8 in 1950. Prematurity was again the major single cause of death in the first four weeks of life. The total number of women who died as a result of pregnancy or child-birth (including post-abortion deaths) was 37 compared with 50 in 1952, 42 in 1951 and 38 in 1950. The fall during recent years in the death rate from tuberculosis was maintained during 1953.

(d) *Infectious Diseases*—The number of confirmed cases of poliomyelitis (332) was slightly higher than in 1952 (309) but was considerably lower than for the epidemic years of 1947, 1949 and 1950. Following the "smog" at the end of 1952 there was an outbreak of influenza during the first quarter of 1953, and there were 514 deaths from influenza during the year compared with 162 in 1952. The incidence of dysentery and whooping cough was relatively high during the year. Although the number of cases of diphtheria (11) reached the lowest on record in 1953, the number of primary immunisations again fell and the annual total was less than two-thirds of what it was in 1949. At the end of the year it was estimated that only a little over half of the children under five had been immunised. The elimination of diphtheria is conditional upon the maintenance of an adequate level of immunisation and the aim is to secure the immunisation of at least 75 per cent. of babies during their first year of life.

The Chemical Branch.

A special feature of the Report is the section dealing with the work of the chemical branch of the Public Health Department which gives a full account of the historical and other major developments in the use of chemistry and allied sciences in the service of the population of London from 1869 to the present day.

Care of Mothers and Young Children.

Eighty-five out of every 100 children born in London attended a maternity and child welfare centre at least once in their first year of life as compared with 84 in 1952, 82 in 1951 and 79 in 1950. Those infants who attend the welfare centres in their first year do so about 12-15 times. Educational activities at these centres, including mothercraft training and health education, have been expanding year by year and in 1953 there were record attendances of 34,977. 43 per cent. of all expectant mothers attended the Council's ante-natal clinics, others obtaining ante-natal care through the hospitals or family doctors. At the end of 1953, there were 110 day nurseries accommodating over 6,000 children under five in addition to which 854 children were being cared for by registered child minders.

Domiciliary Midwifery Service.

The number of domiciliary confinements which has been declining since 1948, again fell from 11,026 in 1952 to 10,472. This reduction in home confinements is due partly to the decreasing birth rate and partly to the attraction of hospital confinements. The number of midwives qualified to administer analgesia has steadily increased and since 1950 all midwives employed by the Council have been so qualified. Progress in its use has been rapid and its administration shown as a percentage of all domiciliary confinements has risen from 3 per cent. in 1946 to over 77 per cent. in 1953.

Health Visiting and Nursing Services.

An average of 369 health visitors were occupied during the year in connection with the various health services apart from the tuberculosis service and the school health service and 832,500 home visits were made apart from clinic and other centres. Progress continues to be made in integrating the work of health visiting and school nursing and in extending the function of the health visitor to cover the care and welfare of the family as a whole. There has been increasing co-operation and consultation between health visitor, general practitioner and voluntary and statutory organisations which serve the family.

Home Nursing.

The demand on the services of the District Nursing Associations which carry out home nursing on behalf of the Council continues to increase. Over 1,724,000 visits were made during 1953, an increase of about 110,000 as compared with 1952. About 44 out of every 100 persons whose treatments were completed during the year were over 60 years of age. The average number of cases in the care of a nurse at any one time was 22.5. A sharp rise in the number of respiratory diseases, as a result of the severe fogs at the end of 1952 and early 1953, and an outbreak of influenza in February, led to an exceptionally heavy demand for home nursing during the first quarter of the year.

Domestic Help Service.

The domestic help service was expanded still further; over 30,000 persons were assisted (three-quarters of whom were aged and chronic sick) and nearly 3,000 full-time and part-time home helps were employed at the end of the year.

Two new extensions of the domestic help service were introduced during the year. The first was a service of night helps to attend chronic sick patients in their own homes to enable the relatives caring for the patients to get one or two nights' sleep a week. The night helps attend from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. and perform those duties, other than nursing, which normally fall to a relative. The second was a service aimed at obviating the necessity of taking children into care, often with consequent emotional disturbances, by providing child helps to care for two or more children in their own homes, where they are temporarily deprived of the care of both parents and have no other adults in the home at night.

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